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POEM

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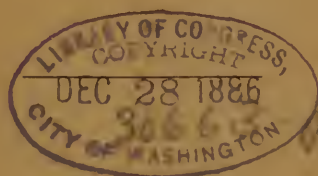
THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

OF THE TOWN OF

TURNER, MAINE

BY

MRS. CAROLINE W. D. RICH



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POEM.

TURNER CENTENNIAL.*

History ever interweaveth
In her checkered web of fate,
Silken meshes of sweet living,
Threads that gleam and undulate
All along the shadowy cycle,
Twining 'round dear names of old,
Like a coronet of jewels,
Strung upon a thread of gold.

People of the past are thronging
All about me, as I write;
They are gathering in the evening,
In the rosy, morning light
They come, through the mists and shadows,
Stalwart men and maidens fair,
Side by side, with heads of silver,
Mingling, thronging, here and there.

* By Mrs. Caroline W. D. Rich, daughter of Mrs. Anna Leavitt Stockbridge, who was the daughter of Joseph Leavitt, pioneer of Turner.

Now they tarry for a moment,
Now are vanishing again,
As, sometimes, the shadows linger,
Over fields of golden grain.
How their griefs and woes are mellowed !
And their loves, so true and strong,
Fragrant as the faded rose leaves,
Hallowed as the matin song !

A century now closes,
Since this town had its birth ;
And still the Androscoggin flows,
With plenty teems the earth.
The wild bird sings his love-song,
The seasons come and go,
And, over rocky hill-sides,
The lingering brooks still flow.
The years are full of promise ;
The sunshine and the rain,
The winter snows, the springtime dews,
Have never been in vain.

Aye, backward roll historic wheels,
And let us see again,
The old-time men and women,
As they were living, then.

It is a simple story,
Yet it is *grand* and *true* ;
No myth, or idle fancy,
Through history's glass we view.
Our fathers felled the forests
On hills and valleys fair ;
They braved the cruel Indian,

The wild beast in his lair.
The solitude of ages
Gave place to busy toil,
And men of good old English blood,
Were tillers of the soil.
They peopled these rough hillsides,
They dwelt beside the streams,
They planned for future ages,
They dreamed their daring dreams.

Not the most skillful limner,
Could paint those early years ;
The heavy burdens of the day,
The nights of ceaseless fears,
When mothers held their babies
So closely to their breast,
As "dire alarm or tragic fear,"
Prevented restful rest.

O, those were days of patience,
When men and women brave,
Were noble and heroic,
Dear liberty to save.

They came from homes of plenty,
One hundred years ago,
Through forests by a "*spotted line*,"
Those men and women strong.
Strong in their love of country,
Strong in their trust in God,
And strong in hope of future
Fruition and reward.
The wild beasts howled about them,
Strange terrors oft would creep

Into their slumbering fancy,
And nightly revels keep.
These primal, dense, dark forests,
Were Indian hunting ground ;
And here the Abenakis,
A powerful tribe, was found.
Near by the Androscoggin,
Their wigwams stood in line ;
O'erhung by pine and hemlocks,
And graceful wild woodbine.

One old, ancestral legend,
You 'll pardon if I tell,
The pioneer — young Leavitt — *
The man whom it befell,
Had built a house of timbers,
Plastered the cracks with clay,
A fire place of unhewn stone,
With his strong arms he lay ;
And then in cob-house fashion,
The chimney carried out,
With sticks, well chinked with mud or clay,
('T was a fine house, no doubt.)
A bar of hammered iron,
Served for a rustic crane,
The hooks were of witch-hazel,
(I trust I make it plain.)
Then like a frontier hunter,
He hung the pot, to cook
The venison from the forest,
Or fish from out the brook.
He left his kettle boiling,
When he went out one morn,
But when he came for dinner,
Kettle and fish were gone !

With yankee wit and shrewdness,
 Young Leavitt, with his gun,
Went out to find a red man,
 And have a little fun.
He met an Indian Sachem,
 And put him to the test,
Explaining the witch-hazel,
 To carry out his jest.
Told how the white man used it,
 To find perennial springs ;
With it he found out secrets,
 And petty pilferings !
And his trick worked like magic.
 When he came home that night,
The pot was hanging on his crane,
 His household goods *all right*.

The women of those early days,
 Were busy as the men ;
For homespun clothes and coverlids,
 Were all the fashion then.
The great wheel in a corner,
 With snowy heap of rolls,
Was turned by fair young maiden,
 Before the glowing coals ;
For, smoother and much finer,
 The fleecy wool would run,
If standing near an open fire,
 Or in the summer sun.

The carding and the spinning
 Of wool, and tow, and flax,
Kept all the household busy,
 While menfolk used the axe.

The little wheel we covet
To decorate our halls,
Our grand-dames kept a-buzzing,
Within their humble walls.
Full many a fine spun kerchief,
Of whitest, softest flax,
Has helped the rustic farmer
To pay his Sunday tax.
Heirlooms of precious treasure,
We keep them all today,
The work of loving fingers,
That long since passed away.

The loom, so tall and clumsy,
The treadle, and the beam,
The warping bars, and harness,
The shuttle, with its gleam,
As flying back and forward,
With deftest toss, it went,
Were, in themselves a poem,
In homes of sweet content.
The new mown hay, so fragrant,
From rafters, down to bay,
Filled all the air with odors,
While girls and boys, so gay,
With peal on peal of laughter,
And milk-pails on their arm,
Came from the yard at milking-time,
Such was life on the farm.

Upon the highest hillside,
They built the house of prayer,
With pulpit like a telescope,
And narrow, winding stair.

From seventeen hundred seventy-seven,
Till seventeen eighty-one,
Good Parson Strickland preached and prayed,
And with a nasal twang,
The deacon, deaconed out the hymn,
And then the singers sang.

Then General Court sent them Priest Turner ;
He came from old Scituate ;
He wore a wig, and cocked hat,
Was courtly, and learned, sedate —
Just a trifle too proud, it may be,
Too liberal in creed about fate,
Knew WHISKEY from old Souchong tea,
And drove through his parish in state.

A legend illustrates his manners,
When meeting a bear to the face,
His polish was too much for bruin,
His courtliness made him feel small,
And so, with his grizzly head drooping,
Bruin turned and jumped over the wall.

Parson Greely, I think, was the next ;
The meeting-house now had come down,
And stood on the side of the hill,
Half way between high and low town.
The parson was learned and wise,
His sermons were wordy and long,
The deacons could sleep with closed eyes,
And sometimes they snored loud and strong.
The young-folk, in pews like a box,
Could whisper and laugh on the sly,
While at noontime they staid in the porch,
And ate bread and cheese and mince pie.

There were huskings, and raisings, and choppings,
And apple-bees, summer and fall ;
There were singing-schools, kept in the winter,
And spelling-schools, better than all,
For then they chose sides, and did battle,
Hurling *mighty words*, each at the other,
And the victor went sleigh-riding home,
With some other girl's handsome brother.

Besides the ministers I mention,
It is my duty, and intention,
To speak of those whose names you cherish,
For there *are* names that ne'er will perish.

Of military men, this town
Had a good share, and some renown ;
For General Wadsworth, known to fame,
Once on a time, to Turner came ;
And as we reckon pedigree —
His grandson — Longfellow — you see,
A scion of the Wadsworth line,
Belongs to *Turner* — and in fine,
Might have been *born* in this old town,
Had General Peleg settled down.
And Joseph Leavitt,* histories tell,
To save old Boston, fought right well.
Turner, and Putnam, and Sawtelle,
Blake, Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell,
And others, heard their country's call,
But time would fail, did I name *all*.

* Joseph Leavitt was a volunteer in 1775, in the original three months' army, to defend old Boston.

Your men of letters, with high aim,
 Have a good record, some have fame.
 Your journalist of earlier days,
 Was Seba Smith, who won much praise ;
 The busy world would pause to read
 "Jack Downing," and forget its greed.
 As humorist, he led the van ;
 Others have followed his quaint plan ;
 Artemas, Twain, and Partington,
 Are scarcely peers of 'Turner's son.
 Of *royalty* you well may glory,
 PRINCES ‡ you have, but not a *tory*.
 One Governor this town has had —
 Ah, no ! I have a note,
 You lost that honor, I believe,
 By just *one single vote*.

A wealthy man — Bradford by name —
 Heard the tin horn, and homeward came.
 The day was hot, and so in joke,
 Upon a stake he flung his coat,
 And to his men he said, " You 'll see
 What a fine scare-crow this will be."
 There was another man, you know,
 Joe House his name — called Uncle Joe.
 He had keen wit, and waggish tongue ;
 He drank " New England " just for fun.
 He was a ne'er do well to boot,
 Was often crazy as a coot ;
 His pranks would make the sternest smile,

‡ Turner has always had men of the name, who have held posts of honor.

And even a scare-crow did beguile
To swap the coat that Bradford left ;
 "Swapping," he said, "could not be theft."
Passing that way, he saw quite plain,
 A scare-crow with a coat. In vain
His challenge for a "swap." No word,
 Indeed the scare-crow never stirred.
At length, said Joe, "It seems quite plain,
 That all my talking is in vain.
Silence means yes, we 'll change at once,
 I can't spend words on such a dunce."
The better coat, Joe wore away,
 And Bradford went without that day.

As glancing over history's track,
 The lapsing years are ranged,
Hardships are scarcely recognized ;
 Change hastens after change.
They come ! they go ! from first to last,
 Men of good blood and brain,
Our fathers left their sons to fight
 Life's battles o'er again.

With eagle's quill is written here
In golden characters, so clear
That truth oft sung, and often told,
 "Good deeds can never die,"
Crushed truth, again will rise ;
 Forever pointing to the sky,
 Forever a surprise.

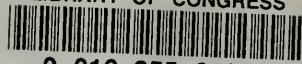
Out of the pain, the toil, God makes
Every tomorrow bright.
Out of truth vanquished, still he gives
Strength for a stronger fight.

My rhymes have lingered in the past,
But, looking forward, themes more vast,
Arrest my thought ; and urge my pen,
To speak a word for future men.
These rocky hills a century hence may see,
The smoking engine, like a burning tree,
Go through these valleys, with an echoing shriek.
It may be, then, across the land you 'll speak,
To transatlantic friends, as you today
Speak to your neighbor, living o'er the way.
Across the seas, a tube may then be thrown,
Through which a novel carriage will be blown,
By compressed atmosphere, on some new plan,
Perchance invented by a TURNER MAN.

Down the shadowy, unknown future,
Thronging generations go ;
Time's dull bell is ringing, ringing,
Time's strong wheel turns sure, yet slow !
As the moments, swiftly passing,
Noiseless come, and noiseless go,
Like the arrow, which the bow-string

Speeds from tensely bended bow
On, and on, till a new century,
Has its mystic cycle run ;
Then, perchance, another poet,
With more gifted pen than mine,
Will rehearse the new — *old story*,
Of the days of "Auld Lang Syne."

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